

Tech and Ties in a Collective Way

Examining the Intersection of Technology Use and Social Relations on Self-organization in Community Group Buying during Shanghai's Pandemic Lockdown

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Background



- The proliferation of food delivery in the platform society.
 - Delivery services have included all kinds of groceries and even some necessities.
 - Individual logics of platform: In Shanghai, China, 26 million residents rely heavily on platform delivery to maintain their daily life.
- Shanghai's Pandemic Lockdown from March 2022 to June 2022.
 - Individual food deliveries from E-commerce platforms were restricted.
 - A small number of grocery suppliers had the permission to deliver groceries.

Key Form of Obtaining Groceries

Community Group Buying

- Community Group Buying: People organized themselves to purchase bulk quantities of groceries in community.
- It existed in RURAL AREAs in China before the pandemic. Tech giants' strategy under rural revitalization strategy led by CCP.
- WeChat groups and mini-programs are utilized in community group buying.



Technology Use & Self-organizing during Disasters

Community Resilience

- Previous studies: Share information, seek resources, work as digital volunteers, connect online and offline.....
- Social relations in technology use:
 - Community as essential social practice where many relationships exist.
 - Before pandemic, community-oriented usage of technology was rare in Shanghai. The atomization in metropolis.

Research Questions

- *#1 How did citizens self-organize themselves for group buying during the Shanghai lockdown?*
- *#2 How did citizens use technology in their community group buying during the Shanghai lockdown?*
- *#3 How did social relations influence the technology use in the community group buying during the Shanghai lockdown?*

Method

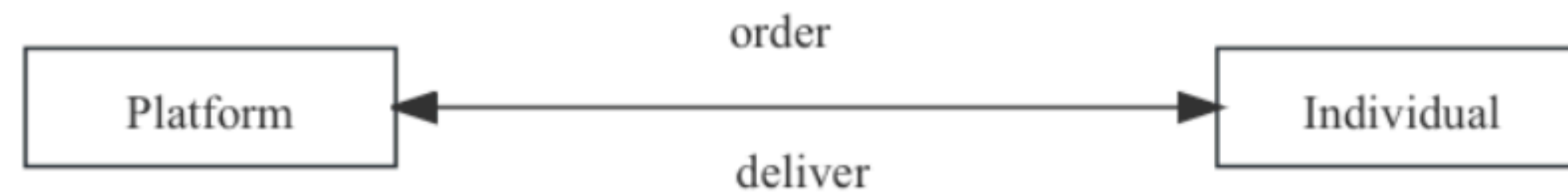
- 13 in-depth interviews from March to June 2022.
- Convenient Sampling and Snowball sampling.
- All participants were experiencing the Shanghai lockdown, and had to be the main purchaser of supplies for their households.
- Age: 24 - 49 (average 31.85); 69.2%female; Different occupations.



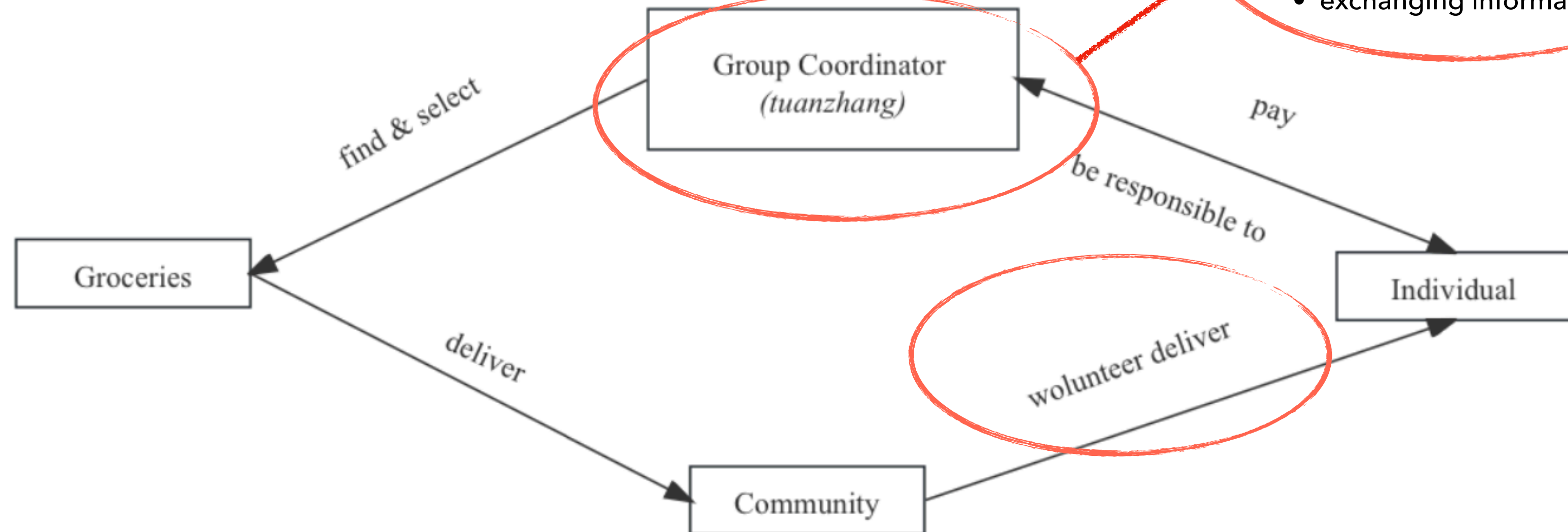
Result #1

The Group Buying Pattern

The pattern before
lock-down



The pattern during
lock-down



Result #2

WeChat Group in Coordination: A central hub

- WeChat group's building.
 - *"There was no WeChat group in the community before. Once when I was queuing for a COVID test in the neighborhood, a man asked me if I wanted to join our community's WeChat group to facilitate group buying."*
- The use of mini-programs: Unexpected use by the designers.
 - *"Usually, I would set up the information that residents need to fill out in a survey, such as their name, phone number, apartment number, the number and types of items they need, and so on. Then, I would export this data from the backend of the mini-program and do some calculations to get statistics."*
- "Digital Refugees" like elderly people. They need to be taught to use the group buying.

Result #3

Guanxi and Power in Community Group Buying

- *Guanxi* influenced the prices, the sources, and the type of groceries that people can get.
- Coordinator has more power to decide what to buy.
- Only those having connections with the committee can become group buying coordinators.
 - *"She said dumplings were only for people in the north, and I feel annoyed!"* (Shanghainese has more chances!)
- Coordinators can get kickback during the process. 10-20%.

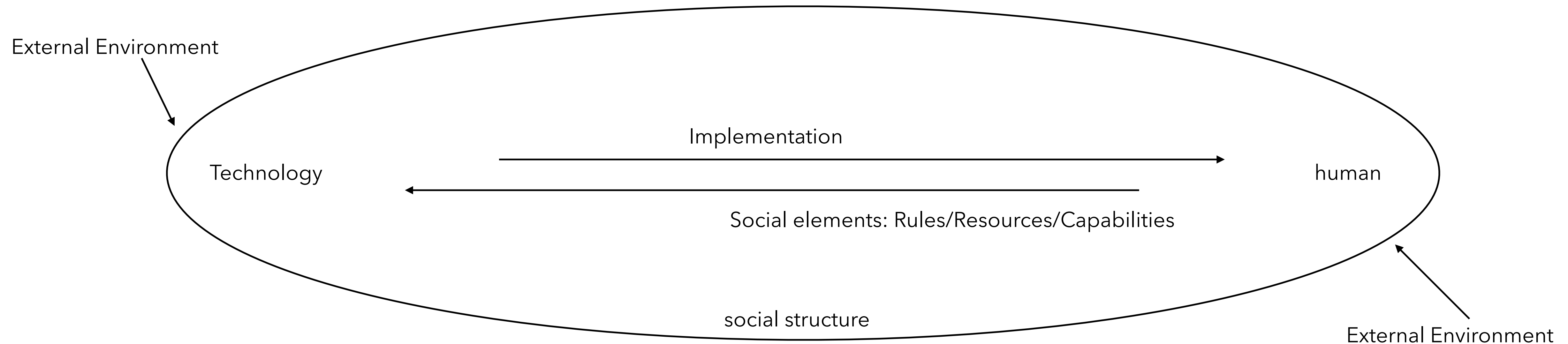


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Discussion

Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST)

- DeSanctis and Poole (1994).




Discussion and Implications

- The social relations re-emerge and affect people's interactions, social organizational structures, and the use of modern information technology, in Shanghai's pandemic lockdown.
- Collective pattern: Not Binary opposition between rural China and modern society, but traditional social relations will also re-emerge in metropolis during pandemic.

Limitations



**Limited number of
interviewees**



**Not considering
institution/political
power in the
pattern.**



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Thank You!